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COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND COORDINATION
Resumed thirty-seventh session
13-17 October 1997
Agenda item 3

DRAFT REPORT

Rapporteur: Mrs. Sharon BRENNEN-HAYLOCK (Bahamas)

Addendum

PROGRAMME QUESTIONS:

UNITED NATIONS REFORM: MEASURES AND PROPOSALS (item 2 (b))

PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1998-1999
(item 2 (a))

Section 26. Communications and public information

1. At its 34th meeting, on 15 October 1997, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered section 26, Communications and public information, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 contained in document A/52/303.

2. The Committee was informed that a detailed report of the Secretary-General on proposals to reorganize the programme of public information has to be submitted to the General Assembly for consideration at a further stage.

Discussion

3. Information was requested on the status of the recommendations contained in the report of the task force, established in March 1997, as they related to the proposals to reorganize and streamline the Department of Public Information and to strengthen its communications and outreach services. The Committee was informed that the Secretary-General had reflected those recommendations in his report (A/52/303), to be submitted to the appropriate intergovernmental bodies during the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. [The Committee was

also informed that the Secretary-General would ensure that the approved proposals would be elaborated by the proposed Office for Communications and Public Information and professionally implemented. This would be achieved by building on specific accomplishments, consolidating those activities that had been effective, by sharpening the focus on specific themes and by reorienting United Nations public information operations within a dynamic communications approach.]

4. Many delegations expressed concern that the intended streamlining proposed in the activities of public information and communication would affect negatively the capacity of the Organization to fulfil the mandates in that area. Many delegations were not convinced that the narrative contained in section 26 translated properly the policy directives contained in the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001,[1] especially in the area of traditional media. Those delegations expressed their disappointment that the allocation of resources for traditional media, especially for radio, did not reflect the importance of that medium and its high cost-effectiveness in the dissemination of information to all peoples of the world.

5. Several delegations were concerned about the impact of the proposed reform measures on the effectiveness of programme implementation and on the quality of services to be provided by the Department given the resource reductions proposed. Several delegations regretted the reorientation of the public information programme proposed, with greater emphasis on communications approaches, distancing itself from the purely informative mandate of the programme.

6. One delegation expressed satisfaction with the Secretary-General's recommendation that information centres forge partnership relations at the national level for its communications and outreach programme. In that regard, some delegations expressed concern about the reorganization and streamlining of the information centres with regard to their continuing integration into the offices of the resident coordinators and were of the view that those activities should be implemented in consultation with host countries and on a case-by-case basis.

7. Several delegations expressed serious reservations regarding the recommendations contained in the first sentence of paragraph 26.3 of the report of the Secretary-General, related to the use of national personnel as the main conduit for programme delivery.

8. Some delegations stressed that they were not in a position to approve the proposal to raise the rank of the head of the Department to the level of Under-Secretary-General in view of the persisting financial crisis of the Organization.

Conclusions and recommendations

9. The Committee was unable to reach an agreement on section 26, Communications and public information.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 6 and corrigendum (A/51/6/Rev.1 and Rev.1/Corr.1).